Annual Bird Monitoring Activities

Central American Waterbird Census

In Latin America and the Caribbean, International Waterbird Census (IWC) implementation began in South America in 1990, as the Neotropical Waterbird Census (NWC), coordinated by Wetlands International. In 2008, Birds Caribbean initiated the development of a Caribbean Waterbird Census (CWC), while from 2000 to 2007, Ducks Unlimited organized bi-annual waterfowl surveys in Central America, the Caribbean and northern South America. In 2011, the Waterbird Conservation Council, in coordination with Wetlands International and BirdLife International, launched the Central American Waterbird Census (CAWC). The latter has gradually been growing in significance, both in terms of the sites and species surveyed, and the number of volunteer participants across the seven countries. Currently, regional coordination is led by Manomet, Inc.

A national assessment of waterbirds for Belize was completed in 2006 by Miller and Miller which covered Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (the largest wetland in Belize) was submitted to BirdLife International. As the BirdLife partner for Belize, Belize Audubon Society is the local country coordinator leading the Central American Waterbird Census (CAWC) in Belize since 2012. The census is completed between Jan 15 and Feb 15 of each year.

To date, the census is carried out in four main locations across the country in an effort to capture a more realistic picture of water birds and shorebirds for Belize. The locations covered are Shipstern Nature Reserve/Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, Hopkins Wetlands and Dangriga.

Great Backyard Bird Count

The National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology started the Great Backyard Bird Count (http://gbbc.birdcount.org) in 1998 and today accepts submissions through eBird from any location in the world. The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is an annual four-day event in mid-February around the weekend of President's Day in the United States. It's an activity that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at www.ebird.org.

The Belize Audubon Society's staff and members participate in this annual activity and focuses on Belize City. We have invited the Scouts Association of Belize each year since 2015 and have been creating awareness about the GBBC by doing presentations in schools starting in 2014.

Urban Bird Watching

The Urban Bird watch was started by the Belize Audubon Society in 2009. The count takes place over the weekends in October and November of each year. It was designed to softly

introduce bird conservation and the importance of wintering grounds for migrating birds from North America. The data collection effort is based on citizen science whereby novice birders team up with expert birders each year and bird the major urban areas of Belize. It's a great opportunity to see urban centers from a new perspective and is ideal for those novice birders who have no intention of trekking through the forest to understand the unique relationship between birds and their habitat. The data collected is uploaded on eBird for the general public to view. The Urban Areas in Belize have increased to now include 12 locations, namely:

- Corozal Town
- Orange Walk Town
- Belize City
- San Ignacio
- Benque Viejo Town
- Belmopan
- San Pedro Town
- Caye Caulker
- Dangriga Town
- Placencia
- Independence
- Punta Gorda Town

Christmas Bird Count

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns—whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won.

Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was orchestrated on Christmas Day, 1900 by ornithologist Frank Chapman. Since then, it has been the longest running citizen science survey in the world and the data collected provides critical information on population trends of birds. The idea was proposed as a new holiday tradition-a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them. There are defined "count circles" established across the Americas in which different teams of bird watchers set out to record the early winter birds. The count runs each year from December 14th to January 5th of the following year (www.audubon.org).

The Belize Audubon Society first participated in the CBC in 1972 with input from volunteers who were avid bird watchers. Presently, the Society coordinates the annual birding activity for Belize and collects data for three of the seven count circles. Other bird enthusiasts, coordinate the remaining four. Each circle is a 15 mile wide diameter, which is divided into sections each with a birding team.

For the BAS circles, the leader of each birding circle is responsible to collect the data and submit to Belize Audubon Society for compilation and entry into the National Audubon Society's Database. Scientists use this information to detect population trends based upon number of birds per hour or per mile of survey effort; to assess the health of bird populations, and to help

guide conservation actions. You can find the results of historical counts in your region by accessing the data from the homepage https://www.audubon.org/content/american-birds-annual-summary-christmas-bird-count. A subsequent Christmas Bird Count Magazine is produced each year with all the results.

Count Circles in Belize:

- Belize City (est. 1972)
- Belmopan City (est. 1975)
- Gallon Jug (est. 1991)
- Punta Gorda (est. 2000)
- Cockscomb Basin (est. 2011)
- Mountain Pine Ridge (est. 2016)
- Spanish Lookout (est. 2018)

Other opportunities to learn more about birds and conservation efforts in Belize include the **Raptor Watch** and **Scarlet Macaw Nest Monitoring** spearheaded by Belize Bird Conservancy and Friends for Conservation and Development; the **Yellow-headed Parrot Nest monitoring** spearheaded by the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment; and rehabilitation for birds by Belize Bird Rescue.